

Dalglish, William
1808.

*The Importance of True Religion, and the
Care of God to Preserve it.*

A
S E R M O N ;

PREACHED BEFORE

THE SOCIETY IN SCOTLAND

(Incorporated by Royal Charter,)

FOR

PROPAGATING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE,

AT THEIR

ANNIVERSARY MEETING,

IN THE

HIGH CHURCH OF EDINBURGH,

FRIDAY, JUNE 5, 1807.

BY WILLIAM DALGLEISH, D. D.
LATE MINISTER OF PEEBLES.

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Society Hall, Edinburgh, June 5. 1807.

*At a General Meeting of the Society in Scotland for Propagating
Christian Knowledge,*

*The Right Honourable Francis Lord Napier, (in absence of the Right
Honourable the Earl of Breadalbane, President,) in the Chair.*

*The Thanks of the Society were given from the Chair, to the Rev.
Dr Dalgleish, for his excellent Sermon, this day preached before them;
and he was requested to give his Manuscript of the same, to be printed
for the Benefit of the Society.*

JOHN CAMPBELL, Secretary.

*The Importance of True Religion, and the
Care of God to Preserve it,*

A

S E R M O N.

PSAL. xxii. 27.

*All the ends of the world shall remember,
and turn unto the Lord; and all the
kindreds of the nations shall worship be-
fore thee.*

THIS psalm was composed by David, and contains a most remarkable prophecy of the sufferings of Christ, and of the glory that should follow. The Psalmist begins by predicting the sufferings of our Saviour at the hand of God, and the very words which he was to utter on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He next foretels his crucifixion by men: "The assembly of the wicked have

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inclosed me ; they pierced my hands and my feet." From the purchase of our salvation by these sufferings, he proceeds to predict the promulgation of it to mankind by the gospel : " I will declare thy name unto my brethren ; in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee : " and then in the text, he foretels a general conversion of men to God, after they had greatly departed from him. " All the ends of the world shall remember, and turn unto the Lord ; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee."

These words contain the four following truths ; which, by divine assistance, I shall briefly illustrate.

I. That to glorify and enjoy God, are the great ends of our creation and redemption, and should therefore be our chief care.

II. That to direct men in these most important concerns, God, from the beginning of the world, gave them proper information of his character, will, and grace, as

their rule of duty, and their guide to happiness.

III. That before the coming of Christ, the worship of the true God should be generally forgotten, and neglected by mankind.

IV. That, by the gospel and the grace of Christ, all nations should be brought to remember, and turn unto the Lord, and to worship before him.

I. To glorify and enjoy God, are the great ends of our creation and redemption, and should therefore be our chief care.

This is the great and fundamental article of religion. It is the primary truth contained in the text; and whether we attend to the character of God, to the nature of man, or to the sacred scriptures, we have the strongest evidences of it. From the views which the Scriptures give us of God's infinite nature and perfection, and of the Persons in the God-head, it is evident that He is infinitely happy, and can derive no addition to his happiness from created

beings. His great design, then, in the creation and government of the world, must have been the manifestation of his perfections, and the conferring happiness on intelligent creatures in proportion to their capacities. Infinite wisdom does nothing in vain. All God's rational creatures are made capable of glorifying him, as their chief duty, and of enjoying him as their chief happiness. To this noble class of beings man evidently belongs. But to what purpose hath God distinguished man with a rational and immortal soul resembling himself, but to make him capable of religion and eternal life? Why hath our Maker given us powers of knowing and worshipping him, but that we should know and worship him? Why hath he made us capable of imitating him in all his moral perfections, but that we might imitate and resemble him? Why hath he endowed us with faculties of choosing and enjoying him, as our chief good, but that we might thus choose and enjoy him? Or why hath he, of his unparalleled mercy to our fallen world, devised and revealed a scheme for our recovery, but that we should heartily accede to it? Is God the Father of our spirits, and the former of our

body, and ought we not to glorify him, in our body and in our spirit which are his? Is he our constant preserver and generous benefactor, and ought we not to live to his honour, “in whom we live and move, and have our being?” Or hath God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, revealed and offered himself to us as the God of Salvation, who will deliver us from every evil, and raise us to the highest happiness we can desire or enjoy, and should we not embrace him as our God and Saviour—love him with all our heart, and serve him with all our strength?

What the character of God, and the nature of man, so clearly demonstrate on principles of reason, God hath expressly declared to us in his word. “And now,” said he to Israel, “what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul *?” “This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise †.” When Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes,

* Deut. x. 12. † Isa. xliii. 21.

on purpose to shew men the chief end of their existence, he concluded it in these words, " Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man *." " Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all inferior things shall be added unto you," was the injunction of our blessed Saviour. Accordingly, while Mary was all attention to his gospel, " she hath chosen," said he, " the good part, which shall not be taken away from her." But of Judas, who betrayed him, he declared, " It had been good for that man if he had not been born." In like manner Paul, after explaining the works and ways of God, affirms this fundamental truth of religion, " Of him, and through him, and to him are all things ; to whom be glory for ever †." And on this solid principle he enjoins this comprehensive duty, " whether, therefore, ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God ‡."

II. To direct mankind to these great

* Eccles. xii. 13.

† Rom. xi. 36.

‡ 1 Cor. x. 31.

ends of their creation and redemption, God from the beginning of the world gave them proper information of his character, will, and grace, as their rule of duty and their guide to happiness.

God in his word assures us, that when he created man, he made him after his own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness ; giving him at once instruction in religion, and a disposition to practise it. The existence of the creation demonstrates the existence of the Creator ; its greatness, proves his immensity ; its order, his wisdom ; and the provision made for the happiness of his creatures, his boundless goodness : so “ that the invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen by the things which he hath made.” He hath endowed men with the power of reason to investigate, and of conscience to enforce the principles and duties of religion : “ For the Gentiles which have not the law,” says Paul. “ do by nature the things contained in the law ; these having not the law, are a law unto themselves ; which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their

thoughts the mean-while accusing, or else excusing one another *."

But in every state of man, the only perfect rule of religion is divine revelation ; which confirms all the principles of natural religion, and informs us of many things necessary to be known, which our own reason could not have discovered. So Job, the most ancient of the inspired writers, tells us, " That to man," literally to Adam, " God said, The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding †." Moses farther informs us, that when God created man, he put him into the garden of Eden, and in trial of his obedience, forbade him ~~on~~ pain of death, to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil ; declaring, that while he abstained from it, he should have right to eat of the tree of life : thus graciously giving his law to man in the form of a covenant. Moses also relates, that to keep mankind in mind of this great principle of religion, that there is one God, who in six days created all things, and rested on the seventh, God ordained, that from

* Rom. ii. 14, 15. † Job xxviii. 28.

the beginning to the end of the world, one day in seven, should be observed as a holy Sabbath, consecrated to the duties of religion, for the honour of God and the happiness of man. When through the temptation of Satan, our first parents violated God's covenant of goodness, and involved themselves and their posterity in sin and misery; God revealed for their salvation his covenant of grace, promising to them the Saviour, as "the seed of the woman, who should bruise the head of the serpent, while the serpent bruised his heel." It is highly probable, that he at the same time appointed the oblation of animal sacrifices, as prefigurations of the Saviour's sufferings for our redemption, and signs of men's compliance with his covenant.

The first generations of men, abusing their long life of near a thousand years, to the purposes of licentiousness and ungodliness, God raised up Enoch, the seventh from Adam, to give them a shining example of religion, and to warn them of a future judgment. The wickedness of men continuing and increasing, God, to give them an awful demonstration of his hatred of sin, and of his

love of righteousness, destroyed the whole world of the ungodly by the deluge; but preserved righteous Noah and his family for re-peopling the earth. He also established his covenant with him, promised never again to destroy the earth by a flood, and that in token thereof, he would restore his bow in the cloud, which, from the state of the atmosphere during the time of the deluge, could not appear. For preserving, in some degree, religion in the old, and establishing it in the new world, the life of righteous Noah, was prolonged for six hundred years before the flood, and three hundred and fifty years after it.

About the time of his death, which was two thousand years after the creation of the world, and as many before the birth of Christ, men began to degenerate from the worship of the only true God into polytheism. In the wisdom of God it was ordained, that true religion should be preserved among the people from whom Messiah was to spring. Accordingly, God appeared to Abraham in Urr of the Chaldees, and called him from among his idolatrous countrymen, into Canaan, established his co-

venant with him, and renewed it with his son Isaac ; promised them a most numerous offspring, and the land of Canaan for their inheritance ; and also that of their seed the Saviour should be born. Jacob, on his death-bed, having assembled his twelve sons in his presence, predicted to them, in these words, the advent of the Saviour, " The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shiloh come ; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be *." About the same time, Job made a most remarkable profession of his faith in Christ, for the instruction of the Gentiles. " O that my words were now written!" said he, " O that they were printed in a book ! that they were graven with an iron pen and lead, in the rock for ever ! For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth : and though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God †."

The Almighty, to shew to men that he was the only true God, and the Saviour of his people, inflicted on impious Pharaoh, his

* Gen. xlix. 10.

† Job xix. 23. 26.

country, his subjects, and the objects of their idolatry, many miraculous judgments, from which the Israelites were preserved. He brought them in safety out of Egypt, and through the depths of the Red Sea, in which their enemies, Pharaoh, and all his hosts, were drowned. He with great solemnity ratified his covenant with them at Mount Sinai, and gave them his laws, moral, ceremonial, and political, which they should obey. He dwelt with them in a pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night; and constantly in a cloud of glory over the ark of his covenant in the tabernacle, from which he gave them revelations of his will, as their situation required. For their support in a barren and parched wilderness, he gave them manna from heaven to eat; and for drink, drew from the rock in Horeb a copious stream of water, which followed them all the way, till they reached the confines of the promised land. Having in this miraculous manner supported some millions of Israelites during forty years, in the barren deserts of Arabia, and instructed them in the knowledge of his will, God did cast out the idolatrous Canaanites, and put his people in possession of their land, as a centri-

cal region of the earth ; that the knowledge and worship of the true God might be preserved among mankind. The whole tribe of Levi, was by divine authority set apart, as the ministers of religion, and distributed among the other tribes for their religious instruction. As extraordinary teachers, prophets were often sent by God, to give farther revelations of his will, to denounce his judgments on the wicked, and call them to repentance ; and particularly to predict the character, sufferings, and exaltation of Christ ; and to direct mankind to believe in him for salvation. That these divine revelations might not be lost or corrupted, the prophets were commanded by God, to commit them to writing ; and the priests and Levites to read them publicly to the people, that all might know them.

The dispensations of God's providence subserved the design of his revelations, for preserving religion and virtue in the world. For if God raised up powerful empires in succession, to punish nations and cities for their wickedness, it was to teach them, that " verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth." If he sent Shalmaneser king

of Assyria to destroy the idolatrous kingdom of the ten tribes, and disperse them over his great empire ; or if he suffered Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem, and for their idolatry, to carry the Jews captive to Babylon for seventy years ; and, upon their repentance, raised up Cyrus king of Persia, to restore them to their own land, it was to shew to Jews and Gentiles, “ that it is an evil thing for men to depart from the living God.” In short, whether God fulfilled his promises, or his threatenings, concerning cities or nations, his great design, as he often declared by his prophets, was, that these cities or nations, “ should know that he is the Lord.”

III. In the text it was intimated, that before the coming of Christ, the worship of the true God would be generally forgotten and neglected by mankind.

This melancholy truth, the history of the world hath but too amply verified.— True religion, must always have the true God for its object, and his moral character and revealed will for its rule. False religion originates in a departure from the wor-

ship of the true God, to that of idols; either as objects of religious adoration, or as the means of it. To this cause Moses ascribed the idolatry of Israel. "He forsook God, who made him," says he, "and lightly esteemed the rock of his salvation." "They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations, provoked they him to anger: they sacrificed unto devils, not to God*." From the same principle, Paul deduced the practice of idolatry, by the Gentiles. "When they knew God," says he, "they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful: but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts and creeping things†."

The commencement of idolatry was early: "Your fathers," said Joshua to the Israelites, "dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time; even Terah, the father

* Deut. xxxii. 15, 16, 17. † Rom. i. 21, 22, 23.

of Abraham, and the father of Nachor, and they served other gods *." Its progress was gradual. Men first worshipped God in his creatures ; then the creatures as representatives of God ; and finally the creatures themselves, and even the works of their own hands, either as gods, or the habitations of gods. The sun, which by its light and heat, cheers and animates the world, was considered as the noblest image of God, and minister of his providence ; and was the first and most general object of idolatrous adoration ; for all the nations, in Europe and Asia, Africa and America, as their histories inform us, worshipped the sun. The moon and the other planetary orbs followed of course ; being nearer to the earth, than the fixed stars, they were supposed to have much influence on human affairs ; which, with ignorant, and superstitious men, not only increased idolatry, but also led to judicial astrology and divination. Accordingly, in the Shanscrit, which was the ancient language of the Brahmanis in India, and among all the nations in Europe, the days of the week re-

* Josh. xxiv. 2.

ceived their names from the sun, moon, and stars, which were supposed to rule on these days.

But these works of God, from being worshipped only as representations of him, came very early to be considered and worshipped as so many distinct deities. So Job informs us: "If I beheld the sun, when it shineth," says he, "and the moon walking in brightness, and my heart hath been secretly inticed, and my mouth hath kissed my hand, this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge; for I should have denied the God that is above."

Angels were generally believed to be an order of beings, holding an intermediate rank between God and man, and were worshipped: good angels, that they might be friendly to men; and evil angels, that they might not hurt them. Eminent men too, the fathers of nations, the founders of kingdoms, or the inventors of useful arts, were not only respected in their life, but believ-

* Job xxxi. 26, 27, 28.

ed at their death to rank with good angels in heaven, and had divine honours paid to them. Reason taught, and rational heathens acknowledged only one supreme God, an eternal, self-existent Being, the Creator and Lord of all; but superstition gradually devised such numbers and varieties of inferior deities, that the worship of the great Creator, was lost amidst the worship paid to the creatures. Heaven and all its hosts; earth, and every thing belonging to it; elements, animals, and vegetables, were worshipped as gods, or the habitations of gods; so that Hesiod and Varro computed the gods worshipped by the heathens, to be no fewer than thirty thousand.

To keep men in mind of their gods, and give them nearer access to their presence, images of them had, so early as the days of Laban, begun to be made. In succeeding ages, as riches increased, and the arts of engraving, sculpture, and architecture advanced, idols were adorned, and over the heathen world, had magnificent temples built, and numerous priests ordained to preside in their worship. The Romans adopted the gods of every nation they conquered, and

built the Pantheon, as a general temple, in which were placed the idols of all the chief gods worshipped over the empire. In every heathen nation, polytheism and idolatry were laid as the basis of their laws and government; interwoven with their constitution, civil and religious; protected by their princes; supported by their priests; and which, though some of their wisest philosophers, as Socrates, Plato, and Cicero, could not help disapproving, they all advised men not to alter.

As the multitude of gods worshipped by the heathens distracted their religion, and turned it away from the only true God, so their mean and immoral characters, shamefully debased it. Cicero charges with this crime, the philosophers, and especially the Poets, who were more generally the instructors of the people. "They introduced," says he, "gods inflamed with rage, and burning with lust. They represented to us, their wars, their fights, their battles, and their wounds, their hatreds and discords; they related their births, and their deaths, their complaints, their lamentations; they shewed their licentiousness expressed

in every kind of intemperance ; their adulteries, their chains, their embraces with the human species, and mortals begotten by immortals *."

Religion is the chief part, and foundation of moral righteousness. Piety and virtue derive their obligation from the same rational nature of man, are enjoined by the same authority, the command of God, and directed by the same rule, the moral character, and laws of God. In proportion, therefore, as true religion hath been known and practised by men, has been the practice of virtue : flourishing, as piety hath flourished ; decaying, as true religion hath decayed. Most of the gods worshipped by the heathens had been men, their characters always imperfect, and often grossly immoral. The worship paid to such deities, in place of improving, corrupted the morals of their worshippers. The sacrifices of their innocent fellow-creatures, nay of their sons and their daughters to devils, were what devils only could have devised, and tended to render men like to them. The heathen festivals held in honour of Pan, Bacchus, and Venus, were authorized indulgences to

* Cic. de Nat. deor. lib. 1.

the grossest licentiousness; which, under the form of religion, in place of raising men to the image of God, tended to degrade them below the beasts. The corruption of the morals of the heathens, from their corrupted religion, all their writers testify : and Paul, who knew them well, publicly affirmed that, “ as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient ; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness ; full of murder, debate, deceit, malignity ; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents *.”

But as before the coming of Christ, the Gentiles had grossly departed from the knowledge and profession of the true religion, so the Jews had greatly degenerated from the sincere belief and practice of it. The Sadducees, who affected to be the chief men of the nation, denied the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, and a future state of retribution ; and indulged themselves in the pursuits of ambi-

* Rom. i. 28, 29, 30.

tion and luxury. The Pharisees, who were the great professors of religion, were generally more desirous to be applauded of men than approved of God ; and “ worshipped God with their mouth, while their heart was far from him.” The Scribes, who were the public interpreters of the law, often made void the commandments of God by a greater regard to the traditions of men. The Priests, who were the appointed ministers of religion, performed its rites, its sacrifices, and washings, but were not careful to explain and recommend what these were appointed to signify. The general body of the nation, like their leaders, though they retained something of the form, had miserably fallen from the power of godliness. In compassion to his degenerate people, growing fast in sin and ripening for destruction, God sent his prophet, John Baptist, to call them to repentance, to point out the Saviour, and exhort them to embrace him ; but few comparatively complied with his exhortation. He at the same time, sent his only begotten Son, possessing all the characters of Messiah the Saviour, which the prophets had predicted. But though a number were brought to receive him, the great body of the nation

rejected him. More desirous of earthly than of heavenly blessings, they wished more for Messiah as a great temporal prince, who should deliver them from the dominion of the Romans, and make all nations subject to the Jews, than as a spiritual Saviour, who should rescue them from sin, Satan, and condemnation to hell, and raise them to the image and favour of God, and the eternal enjoyment of him in heaven. Hearing his divine discourses, full of grace and truth, many of them acknowledged, "Never man spake like this man," yet few believed and embraced his gospel. Beholding his miracles of infinite power and goodness, which God only could perform, many of them exclaimed with astonishment; "It was never so seen in Israel;" yet the chief men of the nation ascribed these miracles to confederacy with Satan, whose kingdom and power Christ came to destroy. When he affirmed himself to be the Son of God, the Sanhedrim pronounced him guilty of blasphemy, and adjudged him to death. And though after his resurrection from the dead, his ascension to heaven, and the effusion of the Holy Spirit on his disciples, many embraced the gospel and became partakers of

its invaluable benefits; yet the Jewish nation, rejecting the Son of God, were rejected from being his people, and exposed to his heaviest judgments. So Josephus their historian, who witnessed both their sin and their punishment, says of them, "I do reckon that if the Romans had made any longer delay in coming against these wicked men, the city would either have been swallowed up by the ground opening upon them; or have been overflowed by water; or else destroyed by fire like Sodom: for it had brought forth a generation of men, much more ungodly than were those who suffered such punishments *."

Such was the universal degeneracy of mankind, and the usurped dominion of Satan over them at the coming of Christ.—The superstition of the heathens, the prejudices of the Jews, and the evil principles and dispositions of both, were combined to support it. Nothing but an extraordinary interposition of the Almighty was able to overthrow it. "For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might de-

* Josephus's Wars, Book V. Chap. 13.

stroy the works of the devil." Accordingly, when Christ was about to enter on his sufferings for our salvation, he said, "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out; and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men after me*." Which brings me to shew,

IV. That by the gospel and the grace of Christ, all nations should be brought to remember, and turn unto the Lord, and to worship before him.

The coming of the Saviour was the era of light, reformation, and happiness to the world. Like the sun rising above the horizon, and dispelling the darkness of night, and the shades and damps of the morning, so did the Sun of righteousness, by his heavenly influence of truth and grace, dispel the darkness of heathenism, illumine the shadowy dawn of the Patriarchal and Jewish dispensations, and bless the world with the clearest revelation of religion and salvation, that ever was given by God to men. He

* John xii. 31, 32.

confirmed that fundamental truth of religion, that there is one God, a Spirit infinite in essence and in all perfection, the Creator, the Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. He revealed more clearly than had been done before, the Trinity of persons in the Godhead ; the works they severally perform in the scheme of our salvation ; the regards that are due to them ; and the blessings we derive from their joint operations. He instituted Baptism in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, as the sign of our compliance with the covenant of salvation ; the Lord's Supper, as the token of our adhering to it ; and both to be seals on God's part, of all its blessings. He explained the moral law in its just meaning and extent, as the rule of our duty ; enjoined by his divine authority the strict observance of it ; and enforced it by his perfect example. As the most powerful motives to religion, he shewed the unparalleled love of God displayed in our salvation, declared the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body, the solemn judgment which he will hold upon all men at the end of the world, the eternal happiness in heaven to which he will then exalt the

righteous, and the everlasting punishment in hell, to which he will consign the wicked.

For the more extensive propagation of the gospel, Christ called his twelve apostles and seventy disciples, to co-operate with him, both in preaching it to the Jews, and confirming the truth of it by miracles. After his resurrection, he gave them commission to go and preach it to all nations. Having ascended to the throne of his kingdom in heaven, he, to qualify them for this great office, sent down upon them, at the feast of Pentecost, his Holy Spirit, instantly endowing them with the knowledge of all languages, and giving such testimony to the word of his grace, that when Peter explained to the Jews that miraculous event, three thousand souls were converted to the faith and obedience of Christ. “There were there dwelling at Jerusalem,” says Luke*, “Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven, Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites; and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,

* Acts ii. 5, 9, 10, 11.

Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Lybia about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians," who witnessed these wonderful works of God, and could not fail to publish them in all these countries. Our Lord foretold, that before the destruction of Jerusalem, which took place about thirty-eight years after his death, "the gospel should be published among all nations *." Paul testifies, that before that period, "the gospel was preached to every creature which is under heaven †." About seventy years after the ascension of Christ, Pliny the younger, stated to Trajan the Emperor, that the Christian Religion "had so overspread cities, villages, and the open country, that the heathen temples were almost wholly deserted ‡." In the year of our Lord, 209. Tertullian in his public defence of Christianity, made this declaration of its most extensive spread; "The Parthians, said he, the Medes, the Elamites, and those who dwell in Mesopotamia, Armenia, Phrygia, Cappadocia; the inhabitants of Pontus, and Asia,

* Mark xiii. 10.

† Col. i. 23.

‡ Plin. lib. x. Epis. 97.

and Pamphylia ; those who dwell in Egypt, those who possess the region of Africa, which is beyond Cyrene ; the Romans in their colonies ; the Jews and other nations dwelling near Jerusalem ; also the numerous people of the Gaetuli, and many other nations of the Moors ; the Spaniards through all their territories, and the diverse nations of the Gauls ; the places of the Britons, which had been inaccessible to the Romans, were yet become subject to Christ ; likewise the Sarmatians, and Dacians, and Germans, and Scythians, and many hidden nations, and provinces, and islands unknown to us, which I cannot enumerate ; in all which Christ reigns, possessing an empire more extensive than any of the four great monarchies *."

• During the three first centuries of Christianity, the heathen Roman emperors, instigated by Satan, and their attachment to idolatry, attempted in ten cruel persecutions, to destroy the Christian church. But these persecutions both preserved the purity of the gospel, and contributed to the propaga-

* Tertul. advers. Judæos.

tion of it. In the year of our Lord, 323, Constantine the emperor, having been converted to the Christian faith, abolished heathenism, declared Christianity the authorised religion of his extensive empire, and gave it every encouragement.

But this noblest dispensation of religion, like those which preceded it, was by the depravity of men corrupted and abused ; and the abuse of it was punished by God's righteous judgments. The Arians, Pelagians and other heretics, early corrupted the church with their errors, and distracted it by their animosities and divisions. The barbarous nations from the north, by their destructive wars and ravages, greatly disturbed the church, and in the year 476, put an end to the Western empire. The degenerating church of Rome, to increase her wealth and dominion, corrupted the truths of Christianity with errors, its worship with idolatry, and cruelly persecuted the faithful, who would not submit to her anti-christian dictates. About the same time Mahomet contrived his political imposture, which, by the arms of his followers, the Saracens and the Turks, was forcibly

imposed on many nations, to the great oppression of the churches in Asia and Africa; and the destruction at last of the eastern empire. From the negligence of Christians to propagate the gospel, and of mankind to receive and preserve it, many nations are still in heathen darkness. The Jews, through their unhappy prejudices, have generally rejected the gospel, and excluded themselves from its benefits. And it must be confessed, that the Protestant churches, though reformed from the corruptions of Popery, have, in too many instances, declined from the purity and vigour of the Christian faith.

But as under the Patriarchal dispensation there was a revival of religion, after the flood; and as under the Jewish dispensation, there was a revival of it after the Babylonish captivity; so the word of God largely assures us, that there will be a more glorious revival, a more universal establishment of it, and a much longer duration of its purity and power, in the latter period of the dispensation of Christ. Thus to Abraham God promised, "That in his seed should all

the nations of the earth be blessed *." To Christ himself God hath promised, " I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession †." David predicted, that in consequence of the sufferings, and under the reign of the Saviour, " all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord ; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before him." " The earth," says Isaiah, " shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse which shall stand for an ensign of the people ; unto it shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious ‡." Concerning the persecuting Power, that should rise out of the ruins of the Roman empire, and " should wear out the saints of the Most High," Daniel prophesied, " that the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom, and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom shall be given to the people of the saints

* Gen. xxii. 18. † Psal. ii. 8.

‡ Isa. xi. 9, 10.

of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him *." Our Lord predicted, that "Jerusalem," for the rejection of the gospel, "shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled †." "But if the fall of the Jews," says Paul, "be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them, the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fulness? For blindness in part has happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, and so all Israel shall be saved ‡." John assures us, that in an advanced era of Messiah's reign, "the everlasting gospel shall be preached to all that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people §." And that then, and during the period of a thousand years, the power of Satan shall be restrained, and truth and righteousness shall universally flourish. "I saw an angel," says he, come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit, and a great chain in his hand; and he laid hold on the dragon,

* Dan. vii. 25, 26, 27.

† Luke xxi. 24.

‡ Rom. xi. 12, 25, 26.

§ Rev. xiv. 6.

that old serpent, called the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years; and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled; and after that he must be loosed a little season*.”

This will be the greatest and most blissful revolution, that, during the progress of time, shall take place in the world: It will comprehend the abolition of Popish idolatry and tyranny, the reformation of all other churches from error and corruption, and the conversion of the Jews, the Mahometans, and all heathen nations, to the true religion of Christ. These great events have a close connection with one another, and must therefore be accomplished about the same time. Like other important events, conducive to the honour of God and to the happiness of man, the general period when they shall be accomplished, hath, so far as the wisdom of God saw fit, been predicted in scripture, that men might look forward, and be excited to prepare for them.

Daniel foretold that the persecuting empire of Rome, in its last, which is its papal form, shall exist “for a time, times, and the dividing of a time*.” John hath predicted, that the holy city, or true church of God, shall be trodden under foot forty two months; and that God’s faithful witnesses, should prophecy a thousand, two hundred and three-score days, clothed in sackcloth†: that the woman clothed with the sun should be “in the wilderness, a thousand two hundred and three-score days, and should be nourished there for a time, times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent‡.” And that the beast, or tyrannical power, which he saw rise out of the sea, actuated by another beast rising out of the earth, prefigurative of the modern Roman empire, under the influence of the Roman pontiff and his clergy, should continue forty and two months§. All these computations, understood in the prophetic stile of a day for a year, and thirty days to a month, amount exactly to the same number, even one thousand two hundred and sixty years. If

* Dan. vii. 25

† Rev. xi. 2, 3.

‡ Chap. xii. 14.

§ Chap. xiii. 5.

then, with some learned interpreters, we should reckon this period to begin, A. D. 606, when Pope Boniface III, supported by the tyrant Phocas, set up his claim to be the head of all Christian churches ; and Mahomet hatched his impious design, of setting himself up as a prophet superior to both Moses and Christ, it will end in 1866. If, with others, we should compute this period from A. D. 756, when the Roman pontiff received from Pepin king of France, the temporal dominion of Rome, and of the exarchate of Ravenna, completing his character as the beast with two horns, ecclesiastical and secular, the papal power will, in some degree, continue till 2016, though as Daniel hath foretold, it will be gradually diminished.

The first of these periods is now near : the last is not very distant : and the interval between them seems not too much, for the beginning and completion of revolutions, so many and so great. The first propagation of Christianity, facilitated by the gift of tongues and power of working miracles, bestowed by God on its ministers, was rapid ; yet it required a number of

years. The same, we may believe, will be the case, in the universal establishment of it, which God hath promised in these latter days. The actual accomplishment of these predictions, as of many others, will furnish the most certain explanations of them, and then the agreement between God's predictions and the fulfilment of them, will be found to be in every circumstance, most minutely exact. But, as by many things the wisdom of God prepared the world for the reception of the gospel, at the first coming of Christ, so it is pleasing to observe, that by many things he is now paving the way, for that universal establishment of Christianity, which shall be effected before his second appearance. By the first preaching of the gospel were the heathen nations converted, from the worship of idols, to the worship of the living and true God ; and we are assured, that as the means of the universal establishment of truth and righteousness upon earth, " the gospel shall be preached to every nation, and kindred, and people." Through their criminal inattention to Christ and to Christianity, the Jews have long continued in enmity to him ; now they are beginning to study more

carefully the prophecies respecting the Messiah, and to have more friendly intercourse with Christians, than in former ages. The corruptions of Popery, and the imposture of Mahomet, were hatched in times of ignorance, and have all along been supported by ignorance, and by keeping the word of God, out of the hands and minds of men. Now, a spirit of free inquiry into religious truth, and a disposition to consult the oracles of God, as the rule of it, is happily reviving; and by the art of printing, the diffusion of all useful knowledge is greatly facilitated. In Europe, the convulsions and revolutions which have of late taken place in France, in Germany, and in Italy, have removed or shaken the chief pillars, on which the fabric of popish corruption and tyranny hath so long rested. The empires of Turkey and Hindostan, which have long been the supports of Mahometanism, are, by their internal weakness and corruption, tottering, and ready to fall.—The light of the gospel, at the Protestant Reformation, made a general discovery of the errors, idolatries, and tyranny of Popery, and recovered to true Christianity, multitudes in many of the nations of Europe,

Colonies of Christians from Britain and other Protestant countries, carried the gospel to the long benighted heathens in America, "who had not yet heard its fame, nor seen its glory." Many provinces of Hindostan have become subject to the British empire, and will, we hope, soon become partakers of our invaluable privileges. In Mahometan and heathen countries, Christians have been preserved, and in many of them are increasing, as seeds of that glorious harvest, which God hath promised in the latter days of his Son's kingdom. In Britain, in several countries of Europe, in India, and in many States of America, Christian Societies have been formed, and are nobly exerting themselves to have the scripture translated into all languages, and disseminated among all nations, as the best means of diffusing over them the light of life. For the same pious and benevolent purpose, Christian Missionaries have been sent out to preach, and to plant the gospel in Tartary in the north, in Africa in the south, in India in the east, and in America in the west; whose zealous labours have been crowned with remarkable success. And, which is not the least promising symptom, many thousands of

pious men of all denominations, and in many countries, forgetting their little distinctions, have united, under the most honourable of all appellations, the name of Christian, and for the best of all designs, the universal spread of the gospel; and are daily and fervently supplicating the God of all grace, that by his special blessing on the means, which they employ, “all ends of the earth may soon see the salvation of God; that so men may be blessed in Jesus, and all nations may call him blessed.”

Thus have I shortly illustrated the important truths contained in the text. As the proper improvement of them, let us ever live under the serious belief and impression, that to glorify and enjoy God, our Creator and Saviour, are the great ends of our existence, and can be attained only by the knowledge and practice of true religion. Let us admire the special care of God, to preserve among men the knowledge of religion, and thence learn its infinite importance. Let us be thankful to God, that while so great a part of the world is involved in the darkness of heathenism, the imposture of Mahomet and

the corruptions of Popery, we are blessed with the religion of the only true God, our Creator and Saviour, in all its purity and perfection, as revealed in the gospel. Let us make the Revelations of God the rule of our faith ; the scheme of salvation he hath held forth to us, all our desire ; his promises the ground of our hope ; and his precepts the law of our temper and conduct. Let us bless God, who, amidst the convulsion and wreck of nations, hath preserved our happy country in possession of its invaluable privileges, civil and religious. No nation under heaven enjoys such advantages for improvement in religion and happiness, and for extending them to others, as Britain. Our best way to have our privileges as a church and nation preserved to us by God, is, that we dutifully improve them to his glory and the happiness of mankind, by doing what lies in our power to promote the interests of true religion and virtue in the world. As our Lord hath enjoined, let our fervent prayer to God be, “ Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name ; thy kingdom come ; thy will be done in earth,

a it is in heaven *.” In our several stations and relations in society, “let our light so shine before men, that others, seeing our good works may be induced to glorify our Father which is in heaven.” And by our fervent prayers, our good example, and our zealous exertions, let us do every thing in our power, that “all the ends of the world may remember and turn unto the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations may worship before him.”

You, the members of the SOCIETY IN SCOTLAND FOR PROPAGATING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE, whom I have now the honour to address, have long and eminently contributed to this noblest of designs. This respectable Society has now existed near a century. It originated from the best of principles, piety to God, and charity to men. It was instituted for the best of purposes, the honour of God, and the happiness of men in time and eternity; and these purposes it labours to promote by the best of means, the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue. Its beginnings were small; but, by the bless-

* Matth. vi. 9, 10.

ing of God, the bounty of good men, and the excellent administration of its Directors, its funds have gradually increased.— At your numerous schools, established in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, near SIXTEEN THOUSAND children, of both sexes, are training daily in important knowledge, religious and literary, and in those arts, by which they may become useful members of Society. Since the first establishment of the Society, many thousands have blessed God in time, and will bless him to eternity, for the benefits they have derived from this most useful institution. Go on, then, brethren ; go on, and prosper in your pious, patriotic, and beneficent design. In the prosecution of it, you co-operate with God, in his noblest work, “ to open mens eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God ; that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them that are sanctified, by faith which is in Christ Jesus.” *Amen.*

THE END.

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APPENDIX.

Society Hall, Edinburgh, March 31. 1808.

THE Rev. Dr Dalglish, who preached at the last Anniversary, the sermon which is now published, died, after a short illness, in the month of September. He was a worthy and learned clergyman; highly useful, and much respected in that part of the country where he lived. The Sermon was prepared by himself for the press, and is faithfully printed from his manuscript.

The Directors record, with regret, the names of several benefactors and members of the Society, who have died since the last Appendix was published.—Sir William Forbes of Pitsligo, Baronet, lately Preses of the Committee of Directors, died last year. His philanthropy and public spirit are generally known, and have rendered his death a loss to his country. The Directors have, on different occasions, been indebted to his zealous co-operation and liberal support, in promoting the objects of the Society.—About two years since, died David Dale, Esq. Merchant in Glasgow. Few characters have more adorned the Christian profes-

sion. He was, indeed, full of faith and of good of works. In those various commercial schemes which his enterprising and benevolent mind devised, and which Providence so remarkably prospered; he combined the several objects of private advantage and public utility. Alive to every thing which concerned the welfare of his fellow creatures, he liberally patronized works of beneficence, designed to promote their temporal or eternal interests. Mr Dale was the gentleman alluded to in a former Report *, who, as soon as he was informed of the intention of the Directors to print a new edition of the Gaelic Old Testament, transmitted, without any solicitation, 200*l.* to help forward that important undertaking.—To these departed friends, the Directors have now to add, Mr James Knox, Writer in Edinburgh, who has officiated as Clerk to the Society since 1796. His eminent worth, his modest and unassuming manners, his intimate acquaintance with the detail of the Society's business, and his faithful services in the duties of his department, entitle his memory to the respect and gratitude of the Directors, and render his lamented death a loss to the Society, which will not soon be repaired.

It is now a year, since the printing of the new edition of the Old Testament in Gaelic was finished. Complaints had been frequently made, that the translation of the fourth volume was too free, corresponding more to Bishop Lowth's translation of Isaiah, than to the English version. For this circumstance, however, no blame can be imputed to the worthy and learned translator of that part of the Old Testament, the late Dr Smith of Campbeltown, who thought it his duty to

* See Appendix to Dr Ogilvie's Sermon, 1802, p. 12.

make considerable use of the version of Bishop Lowth, and to avail himself of the remarks of some late writers, distinguished by their skill in Biblical criticism. His translation is allowed, by Gaelic scholars, to possess a high degree of merit. But notwithstanding its acknowledged excellencies, the effects of so great a difference betwixt the Gaelic and English versions, were found to be extremely inconvenient. The Directors, therefore, judged it necessary, that the fourth volume should undergo a careful revisal, and be rendered more conformable to the original text, and to the English translation. This has been done, accordingly, by the Rev. Alexander Stewart of Dingwall, whose qualifications for such a work are well known to the public *. And the Directors are assured by gentlemen, in whose judgment they have the fullest confidence, that Mr Stewart's labours have greatly improved the version, and rendered it fitter for general use. It is proper to state, that the most considerable variations in the present, from the former edition of the Prophetical Books, are to be found in the prophecy of Isaiah; any alterations that occur in the version of the other Books, are not so material.——This edition consists of 20,000 copies. It is printed in two volumes Demy duodecimo, with a neat type, and on good paper, and sold by the Sub-librarian at 2s 6d per copy in sheets, or 3s 10d bound in sheep. To offer the copies to sale at so low a price as might be within the reach of the lowest classes of labouring people, appeared to the Directors, after due deliberation, a plan better adapted to promote the general circulation of the Bible, than to distribute a great number of copies gratis, and to de-

* Mr Stewart has published a Gaelic Grammar, which is held, by good judges, in high estimation.

mand for those that are sold, a price more adequate to the value of the book. At the same time, the Directors are ever ready to attend to proper applications for copies, to be given away to persons who cannot afford to purchase them. They certainly feel great satisfaction, in offering to a numerous class of their countrymen, so correct a version of the Holy Scriptures, in their own language, at so moderate a price.

The Directors, renew, with pleasure, their acknowledgments to the Correspondent Board in London, for their continued attention to the interests of the Society, and for the liberal contributions which they transmit from year to year. They have repeatedly intimated that these benefactions have become so essential to their establishment, that, in making up the scheme, they are regularly counted upon, as forming a part of the annual revenue of the Society.

The nature of the Society's business, does not afford to the Directors frequent opportunities of presenting to the world, details that will be felt as generally interesting. It is not often that they have it in their power to announce, that large accessions have been made to their funds, from the donations or bequests of munificent benefactors; or to explain to the public the various new arrangements, to which such benefactions give rise. The labours of the Schoolmasters, Catechists, and Missionaries, must necessarily operate with a gradual and imperceptible influence. Nor can their effects be fully ascertained, till the individuals who have enjoyed these advantages, shall have mingled with society, and displayed, in the various departments of life, the result of the information, and habits thus ac-

quired in their early years. On this point, the Directors feel themselves warranted to speak with confidence; and they appeal to facts, well known to all who are acquainted with the former and present state of the Highlands of Scotland.

The existence of the Society for a complete century, has afforded sufficient opportunities of appreciating the value of its exertions. Its utility is well understood, and acknowledged by all enlightened and liberal men, who feel an interest in the prosperity of their country. The schools on its establishment, have had a large share in promoting those improvements in the condition and morals of their countrymen, that have been advancing, for more than half a century, in different parts of the Highlands. Nor have the beneficial effects of its exertions been confined to the civil and temporal interests of men. The sacred Scriptures have been furnished to many, who were ready to perish for lack of knowledge; and schools have been opened where youth of both sexes are taught to read,—an advantage, without which, even the word of life itself, could be nothing more than a dead letter, altogether unprofitable to those who possessed it. Many of the Society's teachers have been distinguished by their real piety, exemplary conduct, and diligence and zeal in discharging the duties of their office. From undoubted testimonies, there is reason to believe, that their labours have, through the divine blessing, been successful in many instances, in bringing those under their charge, to the experience and practice of true religion, and to the enjoyment of the gospel salvation.

The continued usefulness and success of this institution, it is evident, must depend on the character, talents, and diligence of the teachers, who are employed by the Society, in carrying forward their designs. To procure the services of well qualified and respectable men, must be admitted to be an object of the last importance. But to attain this object, it is indispensibly necessary, that the teachers be provided with the means of subsistence, suited to their condition, and to the services which they render to their country. It cannot otherwise be expected, that men of suitable talents and character will enter into the service of the Society. It is unnecessary to point out the consequences that must ensue, if men shall be employed as Society teachers, depressed by indigence, and in respect of education and habits, hardly raised above the mere vulgar. Possessing no personal respectability, little or no advantage could be derived from their labours. The importance of applying a remedy for this evil, is an object with which the Directors have long been deeply impressed, and it has repeatedly been brought before the view of the public *. But the progressive depreciation of money, and consequent advance on all the articles of living, without taking into view the temporary hardships produced by unfavourable seasons, increase the difficulties of the teachers from year to year, and imperiously call for some general effectual relief. As the revenue of the Society is completely exhausted by the expenditure of each year, the only means left to the choice of the Directors will be, to erect no new schools, and to reduce the number of

* See Appendix to Dr Brown's Anniversary Sermon, p. 69—73. and Appendix to Dr Ogilvie's Sermon, p. 10.

those at present on their Scheme, in those places where they may be most easily spared. The Directors would feel much regret, were they obliged to resort to this measure; but there seems to be no alternative, unless they shall be enabled by new benefactions, to provide more effectually for the comfort of a deserving class of men, who have such strong claims on the liberality of their country.

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At all the following places

the Directors have been informed

that there is reason to believe that it does not

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Abstract of the Scheme of the Society's Establishment for the year, from 1st May 1807, to 1st May 1808.

	Salaries.
188 Schools on the first Patent, -	£ 2739 0 0
23 Superannuated teachers on ditto, -	212 0 0
15 Missionaries and Catechists, -	357 0 0
6 Gaelic Bursaries, -	90 0 0
101 Schools on the second Patent, -	536 0 0
4 Superannuated teachers on ditto, -	20 0 0
<hr/>	
337 Amount of the Scheme, -	3,954 0 0

As all the Reports for this year have not yet been received, the number of Scholars cannot be precisely ascertained. But there is reason to believe, that it does not fall greatly short of 16,000.

*The PRESIDENT, DIRECTORS, and
OFFICERS of the SOCIETY for the year
1808.*

The Right Honourable John Earl of Breadalbane, *President of the Society.*

Committee of Directors.

William Macdonald, Esq. of St Martins, Clerk to the Signet, *Preses.*

Robert Scott Moncrieff Esq. of Newhalls.

David Freer, Esq. Clerk to the Signet.

The Rev. Thomas Snell Jones, Minister of Lady Glenorchy's Chapel, Edinburgh.

John Waugh, Esq. Merchant in Edinburgh.

James Forrest Esq. of Comiston, Clerk to the Signet.

The Rev. Walter Buchanan, D. D. one of the Ministers of Canongate.

John Balfour, Esq. of Pilrig.

Robert Pitcairn, Esq. Writer in Edinburgh.

The Rev. David Dickson, Junior, one of the Ministers of St Cuthbert's.

William M'Lean, Esq. Merchant in Edinburgh.

The Rev. Sir Henry Moncreiff Wellwood of Tullibole, Baronet, one of the Ministers of St Cuthbert's.

Alexander Bonar, Esq. Banker in Edinburgh.

Robert Dundas, Esq. Clerk to the Signet.

The Rev. James Robertson, D. D. one of the Ministers of South Leith.

Officers of the Society

The Rev. John Campbell, D. D. one of the Ministers of
Edinburgh, *Secretary*.

Alexander Duncan, Esq. Clerk to the Signet, *Treasurer*.

John Dickson, Esq. of Coulter, Advocate, *Comptroller*.

James Bonar, Esq. Solicitor of Excise, *Accountant*.

Archibald Lundie, Esq. Clerk to the Signet, *Bookholder*.

John Pitcairn, Esq. Merchant in Edinburgh, *Librarian*.

John Dickson, Esq. Clerk to the Signet, *Clerk*.

Mungo Watson, *Officer*.

Annual, and other Benefactions are received by the Secretary, Treasurer, or any of the principal Officers of the Society in EDINBURGH.

IN LONDON, BY

The Rev. Thomas Rutledge, D. D. }
The Rev. Robert Young, D. D. } *Secretaries.*

Charles Grant, Esq. M. P. *Treasurer.*

Or any of the Members of the Corresponding Board,

And by

Thomas Coutts, Esq. and Co. Bankers in the Strand.

FORM OF A BEQUEST OR LEGACY.

Item, *I give and bequeath the sum of*

to THE SOCIETY IN SCOTLAND FOR PROPAGATING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE ; to be applied, either to the general objects of the institution, or to such particular purposes, consistent with these objects, as the donor may think proper.

N. B. Those who may be pleased to favour this Society with Bequests or Legacies, are intreated to express their intention in the very words above directed, and particularly to take care that the words *in Scotland* be not omitted.

TURNBULL & GALL, *Printers,*
Old Assembly Close.

FORM OF A BEQUEST OR LEGACY.

I, the undersigned, do hereby bequeath to the Society of Friends, the sum of _____ pounds, to be applied to the general objects of the institution, or to such particular purposes, consistent with these objects, as the Society may think proper.

And I, the undersigned, do hereby request that the Society of Friends, to whom the above bequest is made, will be pleased to apply the same to the general objects of the institution, or to such particular purposes, consistent with these objects, as the Society may think proper.

Tested at _____
 On _____

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